

Simon Voices



Simon Speaking

SIAG 10th Anniversary

We are proud to announce that 2015 is the 10th Anniversary of Simon Involvement and Action Group.

Our first meeting was in May 2005. Clients of all the Simon Communities were invited and also Joe McGarry from Arlington House London, as our guest speaker. Joe had spent many years homeless in London and became Chairperson of the Board of Management of Novas Ouvertures, the charitable company that ran Arlington House. He was passionate about client involvement and due to his inspiring talk, the people who attended that first meeting decided they would continue to meet monthly and so, the Simon Involvement and Action Group began.

Over the 10 years we have been meeting, 107 people have been members of the Group! Sile NicNiocaill who attended that first meeting is still a valued member to this day.

Some of the highlights over the years include:

- Organising 'My Voice, Your Voice, Our Voice', the Client Conference in November last year
- Publishing over 20 editions of the ever popular Simon Voices newsletter
- Having one of our members represent our views internationally as a member of the FEANTSA Participation Working Group and being a founder member of HOPE a European wide group of people who have experienced homelessness
- Organising training for our members and other clients on:
 - Developing a Newsletter
 - Introduction to Facilitation Skills
 - Working With the Media
 - Communication Skills
- Taking some of our meetings on the road and holding them in Galway Simon and Midlands Simon and visiting services in other communities
- Some of our members are singers in the High Hopes Choir.

Quotes from SIAG members



"I have a sense of belonging, you are always welcomed back after an absence"

"It's support for people going through tough times"

"We meet new people all the time, we learn from one another"

"I like that at these meetings all the people seem to get a chance"

"It brings things out, makes us think of new ideas and helps us showcase some of our talents"

"Your voice is heard – you can talk about things and you are listened to"

"I'm proud to be part of this team"

"I'm from India so it's a new experience and I feel like I belong in the Group. I don't feel like an outsider"

Save The Date 04/11/15! 'Our Festival For You'

Following on from the success of our Client Conference 'My Voice, Your Voice Our Voice' last year, this November we are following it up with a Festival. We hope it will be another day of information sharing, trying out new things and enjoyment. You will hear from Groundswell (London) about their successful projects for clients. You can choose to take part in different workshops and different art and craft and wellbeing activities, you can even join a small choir! This event is being organised by clients for clients. Ask a member of staff for more details.

DATE:

NOVEMBER 4th

VENUE:

ASHLING HOTEL DUBLIN

TIME:

11.00am – 4.00pm

IN THIS ISSUE...

More opportunities for clients to become Board Members

Turn to page 2

It Really Happened

Stories from our members on pages 3 and 4

NEW Gardening Tips and book review

Turn to page 5

What do we want? More opportunities for clients to become Board Members.

When do we want it? NOW!

Some members of the Simon Involvement and Action Group are Board Members in the local Simon Communities. Each of the eight Simon Communities has its own Board of Directors. The Board oversees the running of the Community and have legal duties to make sure that the Community runs properly, uses its money well and is a good employer. Board members have different areas of expertise which they bring to meetings, for example financial, housing etc. We believe it is important that there are more opportunities for clients and ex clients to become Board Members in all the Simon Communities, to share their direct knowledge of homelessness and homeless services and to influence decisions.

What are the benefits of Clients becoming Board Members

- To have a voice, our experience of homelessness is very important and should be heard.
- For us to know clearly what is going on and bring this information back to other clients.
- To be involved in decision making.
- It adds to the mix of expertise on the Board.
- It brings to the Board the experience of what it is like to be a client in a particular Simon Community

How do we become Board Members?

- Campaign to get clients on the Boards
- Speak to management, let them know you want to become a Board member
- Talk about it in the client groups, find out who is interested
- Set up a buddy system. This is where someone who is already on the Board could meet you and goes through the agenda, all the paperwork, answers your questions etc. before the actual Board meeting, so you know exactly what is going on.
- Have the opportunity to attend a Board meeting to see what goes on, before we decide if we want to join.
- Get training. This will help us understand the responsibilities of being a Board member. It will be important to take on that responsibility and participate. It might also be important to be able to say "I'm lost here, can you explain" you explain".
- Fear of what is expected of us and not understanding what is going on can stop us wanting to be a Board member. Also not knowing if we will be treated equally. This needs to be addressed.

Why not write to us at Simon Voices and let us know what you think about this?

Speakout 2015

Dublin Client Action Group organised another Speakout on May 20th 2015. This time the topic was on addiction and mental health. Speakout is an opportunity for clients to communicate with and influence people and organisations who make decisions that affect a client's life.

The evening began with registration, tea and biscuits and a welcome speech. There was a reasonable turnout from clients and the guest speakers were from Simon Communities in-house services along with some external organisations like LifeRing a support group to help people live free from addictions and the Samaritans. Clients had an opportunity to interact on one to one basis with different support teams in a very relaxed way and hence benefited by gathering required information.

At the end there were raffle prizes and delicious refreshments including Kebabs.



Michael and Mark at Speakout.

The Light After Darkness As The Storm Passes



**It
Really
Happened**

Here I am coming into Detox again, another rock bottom wondering, hoping, crying; will this work for me this time? What a fuck up I have made again. All the people I care about have abandoned me again and I have abandoned me again. The drink has taken over again and I am not in control again. My life has become unmanageable again, again and again. How many times can I do this? What can I do different this time? How will I get talking to the people I love? Where? Where will I live? What will I do with my life? Will I get this or will I die on the street like my father, like a drunk? How can I change?

I am sitting in the office of detox shaking, rattling, stuttering being helped to fill out the assessment forms. I blow zero on the breathalyser which means I might get some liberim or a sleeping tablet to take the edge off things and sleep for a few days. My head is wrecked! What? When? Where? How? All the questions, worries, fears rolling around in my head; just let me sleep.

And I did sleep. And sleep and sleep and rested. I cannot remember too much of the first few days in detox. But I do remember the welcoming faces of both residents and staff all saying the same thing: "You will be alright!"

As time passed I was starting to feel better and to eat some food. I talked to my mother and daughter and heard their joy that I was here and sober and safe and back in treatment. How I used to worry about my own father when he was on the streets and every time I drink that is the same worry I put the people I love through. But you can not see that when the addiction has taken a grip. Nothing but darkness and the only thing you want is drink, to forget, deeper and deeper down to a place of destruction. Where nothing or nobody matters, just the next drink, a place void of love and care. What can I do different this time? This is the rock bottom! I had always feared homelessness! To have

followed so far to the place where my father had died; homelessness; here I am in the same place! But I feel I have a choice now with the help of the Simon Community and the help of my higher power. Good, just one more o than God, to be good to myself and to be kind to people around me. I want to do the right thing, we all know the difference between right and wrong, dark and light, up or down, to live or to die and I feel I have that choice. To be good, to do the right thing, to be kind and move up to the light. The sense of something positive, the light at the end of the tunnel, to be the person I am without drink, without that escape into a fantasy world of make believe and lies and despair. No, I want the truth that is something, something stable which I can build on. The truth about me, who am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses? This has been the most real rock bottom for me but the softest landing because of the true kindness, support and guidance of all the staff and volunteers of the Simon Communities who do everything in their power to help in any way.

I have been here now for 15 weeks, first in detox then in rehab and feel that I am in a very positive place. I am going out to Roylands in Tallaght tomorrow feeling good and I have a lot of respect and gratitude for all the love, care and support that I have received. If I can bring a bit of that good will with me on my journey of sobriety I will be flying it. I do intend to start a course in Social Studies in the Liberties or Trinity. I will look after that little child that is inside me, I will brush up on my spellings, writing and computers before next September. I would love to work in this field and want to come back to the Simon to do voluntary work and I hope to give something back. I do believe that helping others is helping me.

Gerry Hutton

Isn't Life Marvellous

When you are free from the strains of addiction

Feeling good? I am. The more I walk the better I feel, the warm wind on my face, the sun warming my whole body. Happiness sets in, a lovely warm feeling surrounds me and I am ready for the day.

I remember when, in the height of addiction I could not shower myself, physically and mentally. I was afraid to stand in the shower because of weakness and sickness and shaking violently all over. I think to myself, 'What a state to get yourself into'.

I decided to give up. It was the best thing I ever did. It was scary, and it took a long week to even feel normal again, but it was great. Even after only a week I felt great, more confident. The sickness had gone and I was now on the road to recovery.

I did not think I could do it. It was not easy. I was determined to get back on my feet.

Now I wake up feeling good, instead of hung over. You look back at what you went through and this makes you determined to keep your sobriety!

So getting back to when I wake up refreshed I laugh and think 'thank God I'm sober' and I look forward to the day. I'm more relaxed and have a nice cup of tea and breakfast. Even if you have not a lot on, you can plan a nice day. Go to the pictures, a walk, meet a friend for coffee, look for a job or work voluntarily. It's all there for you to think about because you are free from addiction.



I love, in the morning if I have time, it's so simple – get up, make my breakfast, turn on the radio, telly on low, bring breakfast back to bed, cuddle up and read my favourite book. At the moment I'm reading Bookends, by Jane Green. It makes me laugh and lightens my heart. It's a lovely, funny, cosy, true to life and a humane book. (For more on this book see page 5).

So go on, each morning you wake say it, 'Isn't life marvellous'

And life is marvellous!

Shelly

Volunteer of the Year

Congratulations to Michael Mackey, a member of our group, who won the award for 'Volunteer of the Year' in the Social Work category at the Volunteer Ireland awards ceremony in Dublin. Michael was one of 500 volunteers nominated for an award and he was also presented with a certificate in recognition of his outstanding contribution as a volunteer with Galway Simon and Simon Communities of Ireland.

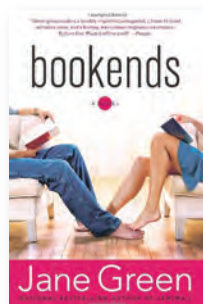


Volunteer of the Year Michael Mackey

Suggested Reading

'Bookends'
by Jane Green
chosen by Shelly.

Cath and Si are best friends, total opposites, always together and both unlucky in love.



Cath is scatty, messy and emotionally closed and Si is impossibly tidy and desperate for a man of her own. They live near each other in West Hampstead, close to their other best friends Josh and Lucy, who are married with a devil spawn child called Max and a terrifying Swedish nanny called Ingrid.

When Portia steps back into their lives, beautiful Portia the undisputed queen of their group at university, who broke their collective hearts one night and from whom they have all gradually silently, grown apart. Her reappearance sets off a chain of events that tests Cath and her friends to the limit. Does Portia have a hidden agenda, or is she just looking for happy endings all around? Whatever the answers, none of them could ever predict the outcome.

Praise for Jane Green's earlier bestsellers:
"Funny, honest, it's superb stuff" *Company*
"Funny and poignant, you'll devour it in one sitting" *Cosmopolitan*

**Do you have a favourite book
you'd like to tell us about?**

If so write in and tell us about it.



Gardening Tips

**Its summer time and not too late
to do some planting!**

Here are some suggestions for plants to put in window boxes and hanging baskets

- For centre pieces you could use Geraniums, Phormiums, Petunias or Marigolds.
- Then add Verbena, Nemesis, Begonias, Bacopas, Violas, Pansies or anything you fancy.
- For the outside of the box or basket use trailing lobelia, variegated ivy or plain trailing ivy for best results.
- Plant in compost or use half compost, half clay.
- Make sure you water once a week or more if the soil gets dry.

**Do you have any pictures of your
plants, if so, send them in to Simon
Voices. We'll print them in the next
edition.**



SUMMER WORD SEARCH

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| BATHINGSUIT | S | N | S | I | R | T | N | D | W | I | B | Z | S |
| BEACH | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BEACHBALLS | U | U | U | B | A | I | S | O | K | R | E | O | L |
| FLOAT | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| POOL | N | S | N | N | E | U | W | A | S | T | A | P | I |
| PUT | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SHORTS | G | E | B | T | W | S | T | O | I | N | C | X | P |
| SLIPPERS | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SUMMER | L | Q | L | I | A | G | A | X | Z | O | H | A | P |
| SUNBLOCK | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SUNGLASSES | A | M | O | M | T | N | O | I | H | S | B | C | E |
| SUNTANLOTION | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| USE | S | T | C | L | E | I | L | Z | L | H | A | W | R |
| WATER | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| WEAR | S | U | K | I | R | H | F | O | C | R | L | A | S |
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IF WE CAN DO IT – YOU CAN DO IT RECIPES

Dublin Coddle



Serves 2 to 3 people

- 2 medium onions - thinly sliced
- 6 back rashers (rind removed if you prefer)
- 6 fat traditional pork sausages
- 2 carrots peeled and sliced
- 6 potatoes halved or quartered

Method

- Place in a large saucepan and cover with water or for an even better taste with chicken or beef stock.
- Bring to the boil and simmer for 45 minutes. Check to see if it needs topping up with water as you go.

Instant Strawberry Ice-cream



2 or 3 small bowls of frozen strawberries with the seeds removed from the centre.

- 1 small bowl of cream (Or use yogurt or buttermilk for a healthier option)
- Half a small bowl of sugar (or as per taste)
- 1 tsp of vanilla extract
- 1 meringue
- Wafers

Method

- Add the ingredients in a food processor and blend on low speed for about 2 minutes. If you don't have a food processor mash everything together quickly with a large fork. Serve with sliced fresh strawberries and few bits of meringues for crunch. Decorate with wafers.

Tip

You can put it in the freezer and any other berries can also be used.

Simon Voices Needs You!

We want to hear from you. Please send your personal stories, opinions, poems, pictures or news to Catri O'Kane, Simon Communities of Ireland, St Andrew's House, 28 – 30 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2 or email to catri.okane@simoncommunity.com.

If we publish your entry we will send you €10.00 phone credit (any network) as a small thank you.

We may not be able to publish everything we receive. Thank you to everybody who has sent in a contribution.

Competition

Be in with a chance to win a €50 voucher! Can you work out the answer to the riddle below?

A man is pointing at a photograph and says to the man beside him

***"Brothers and sisters I have none
But this man's father is my father's son"***

Who is he talking about?



If you think you know the answer contact Simon Involvement and Action Group c/o Catri O'Kane, Simon Communities of Ireland, 28 -30 Exchequer Street Dublin 2. Or text you answer with your name to 0877993860. Or email catri.okane@simoncommunity.com. Closing Date 31st October 2015.